**WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:**

1. An antimicrobial composition comprising:

(a) about 0.1% to about 10%, by weight, of an aromatic carboxylic acid;

(b) about 5% to about 50%, by weight, of a hydric solvent;

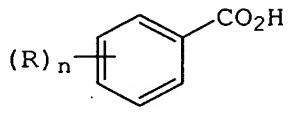
(c) a sufficient amount of a pH-adjusting compound to provide a pH of about 2 to about 5.5; and

(d) a carrier comprising water.

2. The composition of claim 1 comprising about 0.1% to about 5%, by weight, of the aromatic carboxylic acid.

3. The composition of claim 1 wherein the aromatic carboxylic acid has a pKa of about 2.5 to about 7.

4. The composition of claim 1 wherein the aromatic carboxylic acid has a structure




wherein R, independently, is selected from the group consisting of hydroxy, $C_{1-4}$alkyl, $C_{1-4}$alkoxy, amino, halo, phenyl, and benzyl; and n is 0, 1, or 2.

5. The composition of claim 1 wherein the aromatic carboxylic acid is selected from the group consisting of salicylic acid, benzoic acid, *o*-aminobenzoic acid, *m*-aminobenzoic acid, *p*-aminobenzoic acid, *o*-bromobenzoic acid, *m*-bromobenzoic acid, *o*-chlorobenzoic acid, *m*-chlorobenzoic acid, *p*-chlorobenzoic acid, 2,4-dihydroxybenzoic acid, 2,5-dihydroxybenzoic acid, 3,4-dihydroxybenzoic acid, 3,5-dihydroxybenzoic acid, ethylbenzoic acid, *m*-hydroxybenzoic acid, *p*-hydroxybenzoic acid, *o*-iodobenzoic acid, *m*-iodobenzoic acid, methyl-*o*-aminobenzoic acid, methyl-*m*-aminobenzoic acid, methyl-*o*-aminobenzoic acid, *o*-phenylbenzoic acid, isopropylbenzoic acid, and mixtures thereof

6. The composition of claim 1 wherein the antimicrobial agent comprises salicylic acid, benzoic acid, *m*-hydroxybenzoic acid, *p*-hydroxybenzoic, *o*-aminobenzoic acid, *m*-aminobenzoic acid, *p*-aminobenzoic acid, or a mixture thereof.

7. The composition of claim 1 wherein the aromatic carboxylic acid is the sole antimicrobial agent in the composition.

8. The composition of claim 1 wherein the composition is essentially free of a surfactant.

9. The composition of claim 1 comprising about 7% to about 45%, by weight, of the hydric solvent.

10. The composition of claim 1 wherein the hydric solvent has a Hansen solubility parameter of about 18 to about 38.

11. The composition of claim 1 wherein the hydric solvent is selected from the group consisting of methanol, ethanol, isopropyl alcohol, n-butanol, n-propyl alcohol, ethylene glycol, propylene glycol, glycerol, diethylene glycol, dipropylene glycol, tripropylene glycol, hexylene glycol, butylene glycol, 1,2,5-hexanetriol, sorbitol, PEG-4, benzyl alcohol, and mixtures thereof.

12. The composition of claim 1 wherein the hydric solvent comprises dipropylene glycol, benzyl alcohol, isopropanol, ethanol, or a mixture thereof.

13. The composition of claim 1 wherein the pH-adjusting compound is present in an amount of about 1% to about 5%, by weight, of the composition.

14. The composition of claim 1 having a pH of about 2 to about 5.

15. The composition of claim 1 wherein the pH-adjusting compound comprises sodium phosphate, sodium dihydrogen phosphate, disodium hydrogen phosphate, sodium hydroxide, potassium hydroxide, or a mixture thereof.

16. The composition of claim 1 comprising:

(a) about 0.2% to about 5%, by weight, of an aromatic carboxylic acid as the sole antimicrobial agent;

(b) about 10% to about 40%, by weight, of a hydric solvent;

(c) a sufficient amount of a pH-adjusting compound to provide a pH of about 2.25 to about 5,

wherein the composition is essentially free of a surfactant.

17. A method of reducing a bacteria population on a surface comprising contacting the surface with a composition of claim 1 for 30 seconds to achieve a log reduction of at least 3 against *S. aureus* or a log reduction of at least 3 against *E. coli*.

18. The method of claim 17 wherein the composition achieves a log reduction of at least 3 against *S. aureus* and a log reduction of at least 3 against *E. coli*.

19. The method of claim 17 wherein a log reduction of at least 3 is achieved in a viral population.

20. The method of claim 19 wherein the viral population comprises Rhinovirus 1A, Rhinovirus 2A, Rotavirus Wa, and mixtures thereof.

21. The method of claim 17 wherein the surface is a skin of a mammal.

22. A method of reducing a viral population on a surface comprising contacting the surface with a composition of claim 1 for 30 seconds to achieve a viral log reduction of at least 3.

23. The method of claim 22 wherein the viral population comprises Rhinovirus 1A, Rhinovirus 2A, Rotavirus Wa, and mixtures thereof.

24. The method of claim 22 wherein the surface is a skin of a mammal.